Introduction

The Higher Education Academy’s (HEA’s) Framework for partnership in learning and teaching in higher education has been developed in response to the need identified in the sector for greater clarity and focus in broader discussions of student engagement and partnership.

This framework is informed by a companion publication, Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education, which provides a conceptual model for partnership (Healey, Flint and Harrington 2014). It draws on that conceptual model, and provides a set of partnership values, to offer support for the development and enhancement of partnerships between students and staff, among students, and between higher education institutions (HEIs) and their students’ unions, associations or guilds in learning and teaching.

Who is it for?

The framework is offered as a tool for all partners (staff, students, institutions and students’ unions) to use to reflect on, inspire and enhance practice and policy relating to partnerships in learning and teaching.

Engagement through partnership

In this framework, partnership is understood as a relationship in which all involved are actively engaged in and stand to gain from the process of learning and working together to foster engaged student learning and engaging learning and teaching enhancement. Partnership is essentially a way of doing things, rather than an outcome in itself.

Partnership is a process of student engagement, but these terms are not interchangeable. For example, partnership reflects a qualitatively different approach to student engagement than listening to, or consulting with students. In this sense, all partnership is student engagement, but not all student engagement is partnership; hence the approach here is described as engagement through partnership.

Given the different influences on partnership within learning and teaching — from the experiences and expertise of partners, the culture and history of the course, department, institution, students’ union where partnership takes place, and the wider social and political context — a prescriptive and tightly defined concept of partnership would be unlikely to work.

The case for partnership

There are many different individual and collective motivations for engaging in partnership in learning and teaching. Some of these are described below:
- to design and deliver engaging student learning experiences;
- to make higher education more accessible and inclusive;
- to align with personal beliefs and values about learning and teaching;
- to develop a sense of community and belonging;
- to develop student and staff knowledge and capabilities;
- to address some of the challenges currently facing higher education;
- to offer a constructive alternative to consumerist models of higher education;
- to align with national policy imperatives which place engagement and partnership as key to quality enhancement.

The HEA’s focus is on the pedagogic rationale for partnership: how it can lead to increased student engagement with, and success in, their learning as well as supporting the design, delivery and support of engaged student learning. Developing engaged student learning through partnership in learning and teaching leads to evidenced benefits for both staff and students. Students are better engaged with the process of learning in and out of contact-time; develop essential high level knowledge and skills to support their employability; and feel a sense of belonging and community that the ‘What Works?’ programme has shown is key to student retention and success. Staff experience renewed engagement with and transformed thinking about their practice, and a deeper understanding of contributions to an academic community.

Whatever the rationale for staff, students, institutions and students’ unions to develop partnerships in learning and teaching this framework aims to offer an evidence informed and reflective approach to support their development. While there may be specific situations and contexts where partnership is not currently appropriate or possible, we encourage the use of this framework to critically reflect on how partnership might work in your context, how it might benefit students and staff, and how you might implement partnership approaches in the future.
The framework

Figure 1: A conceptual model for students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education (Healey, Flint and Harrington 2014).
The conceptual model (Figure 1) describes four overlapping areas in which partnerships among students, and between students and staff, in learning and teaching may be located:

- learning, teaching and assessment;
- subject-based research and inquiry;
- scholarship of teaching and learning;
- curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy.

The overlapping nature of these circles reflects the inter-relationships between the different areas. In practice, partnership can rarely be consigned to a single area. At the centre of the framework is the development of partnership learning communities, which provide the process through which these different areas of partnership can be achieved and sustained. For partnership to be embedded and sustained beyond documents, projects and initiatives, it needs to become part of the culture and ethos of the institution.

Developing strong partnership learning communities which engage staff and students is key to this. Moving from left to right, there is a shift in emphasis from learning, teaching and research to the enhancement of learning and teaching. The vertical axis shows an emphasis on students and staff as co-learners, co-designers and co-developers (top) and co-researchers and co-inquirers (bottom).

**Partnership principles and values**

Drawing on the literature on successful partnership and engaged student learning, core values which underpin successful partnership in learning and teaching are suggested. The relative importance of each of these values may vary in different contexts, and there may be additional values you want to include for your partnerships:

- **authenticity** – all parties have a meaningful rationale for investing in partnership, and are honest about what they can contribute and the parameters of partnership;
- **inclusivity** – partnership embraces the different talents, perspectives and experiences that all parties bring, and there are no barriers (structural or cultural) that prevent potential partners getting involved;
- **reciprocity** – all parties have an interest in, and stand to benefit from working and/or learning in partnership;
- **empowerment** – power is distributed appropriately and all parties are encouraged to constructively challenge ways of working and learning that may reinforce existing inequalities;
- **trust** – all parties take time to get to know each other, engage in open and honest dialogue and are confident they will be treated with respect and fairness;
- **challenge** – all parties are encouraged to constructively critique and challenge practices, structures and approaches that undermine partnership, and are enabled to take risks to develop new ways of working and learning;
- **community** – all parties feel a sense of belonging and are valued fully for the unique contribution they make;
- **responsibility** – all parties share collective responsibility for the aims of the partnership, and individual responsibility for the contribution they make.
How can it be used?

Ways in which the Framework for partnership in learning and teaching in higher education could be used as a tool to enhance policy and practice include:

• to plan or reflect on a specific initiative or process where engagement through partnership is important;
• to review the curriculum and make pedagogic decisions;
• to inform validation and course approval processes;
• to frame research into partnership — for example, exploring disciplinary differences in pedagogies of partnership;
• to undertake a mapping exercise of current practice across an institution, faculty or department
• to assess institutional readiness for partnership;
• to explore the relationship between an institution and its students’ union, association or guild
• to develop a sense of community among students and staff;
• to develop ground rules for partnership meetings and initiatives;
• to develop meaningful strategies and policies — for example, a ‘partnership agreement’;
• to inform professional development for staff;
• to benchmark across and between institutions.

What does this mean for practice and policy?

Taking the values underpinning partnership as a starting point, a useful first step is for partners to collaboratively explore and agree on shared values. These can then be used to explore how learning and working arrangements (including structures, processes and policies) enable these values and how individual attitudes and behaviours embody these in practice.

The HEA is developing an inventory for partnership in learning and teaching, which contains a series of self-evaluation questions to support staff, students, institutions and students’ unions who wish to explore how they could develop and embed learning and teaching partnerships. The questions are intended to be used as a departure point for conversations about partnership — wherever you are in the process — and can be used alongside normal planning processes: having an open dialogue is the most important first step to putting partnership into practice.

The questions are separated into those that encourage critical consideration of the context and case for partnership (A), those which relate to putting the partnership values into practice (B), and those which ask about the four areas of the conceptual model (C). The questions can be asked at any level: for example, thinking about the institution/students’ union, a specific initiative, or practice and processes at the department, faculty, module or individual level. A selection of these questions are included below.

The questions can be used to take stock of where you are in terms of partnership in learning and teaching, identify gaps and priorities for the future, assess institutional readiness and reflect on where you would like to be.

A. The context and case for partnership

1. What is the rationale for partnership and do all potential partners share this rationale?
2. Which areas of learning and teaching are open to partnership, and why?
3. To what extent does the culture and ethos of the organisation/institution emphasise partnership in learning and teaching?
4. How do leaders model partnership in learning and teaching?
5. How far do current partnership activities focus on
   a. learning, teaching and assessment;
   b. subject-based research and inquiry;
   c. the scholarship of teaching and learning;
   d. curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy?
B. Putting partnership into practice

1. Do all students and staff share the same assumptions and values about partnership in learning and teaching?
2. Are partnership opportunities available to all students and staff, and who actually participates?
3. Who stands to benefit from being a partner and in what ways?
4. How is power distributed and to what extent do existing structures and processes enable distributed power or, conversely, reinforce existing inequalities?
5. To what extent, and how, is open and honest dialogue between partners encouraged and enabled?
6. What resources are available to students and staff to support innovation and risk-taking?
7. To what extent, and how, do the physical and online spaces managed by the institution/students’ union lend themselves to partnership working and/or learning?
8. To what extent do students and staff see partnership in learning and teaching as their responsibility?

C. The conceptual framework

1. Learning, teaching and assessment
   a. To what extent, and how, are active and collaborative learning approaches embedded in student learning experiences?
   b. How are students and staff involved in the delivery and assessment of learning?
   c. Is the use of pedagogic approaches that promote partnership between students and staff, and among students, supported and rewarded?

2. Subject-based research and inquiry
   a. To what extent, and how, do pedagogic approaches emphasise learning as discovery and inquiry?
   b. In what ways do pedagogic approaches reflect disciplinary research processes?
   c. To what extent, and how, do students and staff contribute to the development of knowledge in their subject area/professional field?

3. Scholarship of teaching and learning
   a. To what extent, and how, are students and staff involved in the evaluation of learning and teaching practices?
   b. Who takes responsibility for using research findings to bring about change in learning and teaching?
   c. How are students and staff recognised and rewarded for their role in the scholarship of learning and teaching?

4. Curriculum design and pedagogic consultancy
   a. To what extent, and how, do students and staff shape the curriculum?
   b. What role do staff and students play in course approval and validation processes?
   c. What role do students and staff play in the design and delivery of professional development in learning and teaching?

Alignment with the UK Professional Standards Framework

Staff and students who have roles in teaching and supporting learning in higher education may want to use the Framework for student and staff partnerships in learning and teaching alongside the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF). Partnership may be a useful lens through which to explore the dimensions of the UKPSF through, for example:

- considering how you can take a partnership approach to each of the five areas of activity and what potential benefits and opportunities this may create;
- exploring how all partners could contribute to the six areas of core knowledge;
- employing partnership as a means of upholding and developing the four professional values.

For more information about the UKPSF please visit www.heacademy.ac.uk/ukpsf
Next steps

The HEA will work with academic and professional services staff, institutions, students’ unions and their students to support them to use the Framework for student and staff partnerships in learning and teaching to enhance policy and practice, either on its own or alongside other tools and services. For example, a useful first step may be to use the self-evaluation questions as a mapping exercise, alongside a student engagement survey (www.heacademy.ac.uk/surveys/engagement) to explore connections between partnership and engaged student learning.

To discuss how the HEA could support you or your institution through our collaborative and responsive consultancy services, please contact consultancy@heacademy.ac.uk. In addition, during 2014-15 the HEA will be supporting a group of higher education providers to take forward strategic enhancement projects on the theme of engaged student learning. This initiative will include a strong focus on student and staff partnerships. To find out more about this, please contact studentsaspartners@heacademy.ac.uk or Dr John Craig, Assistant Director (john.craig@heacademy.ac.uk).

The development of this framework has been led by Dr Abbi Flint and Dr Kathy Harrington. The HEA is grateful to Professor Mick Healey, for his work on the scholarly underpinning and development of the conceptual model included in this framework. This framework can be used in conjunction with the more detailed HEA publication: Healey, M., Flint, A. and Harrington, K. (2014) Engagement through partnership: students as partners in learning and teaching in higher education. York: Higher Education Academy. This publication examines the motivations and rationales for engaging in partnership, identifies examples of strategic and sustainable practices of engaging students as partners in learning and teaching, and outlines how the development of partnership learning communities may guide and sustain practice in this area. (Available from www.heacademy.ac.uk/students-as-partners.)

For more information about the HEA’s students as partners work please contact studentsaspartners@heacademy.ac.uk and follow us on twitter @HEA_SaP.
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We offer services at a generic learning and teaching level as well as in 28 different disciplines. Through our partnership managers we work directly with HE providers to understand individual circumstances and priorities, and bring together resources to meet them. The HEA has knowledge, experience and expertise in higher education. Our service and product range is broader than any other competitor.

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